



# Portraits of Patriotism

## “The Americans Have Come!”

**T**HOSE four words electrified the crowds in Paris as the news reached the French after four long years of war. They announced the early summer 1917 arrival of a hurriedly assembled American Expeditionary Force, the 1st Infantry Division. As depicted in the painting above, by French artist J.F. Boucher, on America’s Independence Day, July 4, troops of the 1st Inf. Div. and its regimental band paraded through the French capital amidst wild cheers of “Vive l’Amerique! Vive l’Amerique!” Parisians cried, waved handkerchiefs and flags, blew kisses, tossed flowers and embraced soldiers. While the lead element of the AEF — commanded by GEN John J. “Blackjack” Pershing — consisted of just 191 soldiers, it represented a great hope for the future. By the Fourth of July one year later, more than 1 million American soldiers had tramped down gangplanks at French ports to help make the world, in President Woodrow Wilson’s words, “safe for democracy.”

Wilson’s lofty goal would be purchased at a steep and often horrific cost for the United States. Whether battling the Germans on the Aisne and Marne fronts, or advancing at St. Mihiel and in the Meuse-Argonne, the AEF suffered 264,000 casualties by war’s end. These included 50,554 killed in battle and about an equal number felled by disease. Yet those sacrifices hastened the nation’s transformation from its isolationist upbringing into an irresistible military and industrial powerhouse on the world’s stage to preserve — and later, to advance — democracy. In both an immediate and in an enlightened sense, truly, the Parisians had been right in 1917: The Americans *had* come. — *CPT Patrick Swan*

